

VIA PACIS

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
CONCERNING
“HOW TERMS OF PEACE
CAN BE AUTOMATICALLY PREPARED
WHILE THE WAR IS STILL GOING ON”

A SUGGESTION
OFFERED BY AN AMERICAN
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For transfer
Department of State.
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L.C.S. Dec 7/29
Col. C. M. House,

Dear Sir:—

In writing the pamphlet "Via Pacis", I took pains to avoid entering into discussions concerning the present war, merely presenting in generic terms a method for hastening the termination of warfare in *any* conflict that might be under consideration. I now venture to depart for a moment from this distant attitude and to explain my convictions regarding the applicability of the system to the war now in progress. For this purpose I now offer:

1. An analysis of "Via Pacis" in the light of the Present Situation,
2. A suggested sketch of "Stepping Stones" for putting the plan into operation,
3. A refutation of certain criticisms of "Via Pacis",
4. An appendix containing public utterances of interest in this connection.

ANALYSIS OF "VIA PACIS" IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION.

Already in the early months of the present year, the act of communicating peace notes and replies

thereto involved the recognition on the part of *all belligerents* of features adopted in "Via Pacis". These were:

1. Employment of neutrals as *transfer agents*, rather than as possible mediators.
2. Employment of the method of *direct communications* to be submitted to the opponent.
3. *Publicity* of intercourse.

The *Entente* in replying to President Wilson committed itself at least to a:

4. Statement of general aims.

The *Central Powers* (replying to President Wilson) were even also willing to accept:

5. Direct exchange of terms in precise and concrete form.

The *neutrals* also showed complete readiness to play the:

6. Static Rôle of transfer agents and in general proclaimed their desire to know the terms of each side.

The essential points of divergence between the two groups of belligerents concern four features:

1. *Duration* of the war, the Entente standing for continuance, the Central Powers for cessation,
2. *Unity* of action, the Entente adopting joint notes, the Central Powers making use of separate notes,
3. *Negotiation*, rejected by the Entente, solicited by the Central Powers,
4. *Immediate exchange of complete and precise terms*, by inference distasteful to the Entente,

desired by the Central Powers (witness the attitude of the Entente towards Germany's announcement that she had terms ready for presentation at the peace conference).

The compromise character of "Via Pacis" is well shown by the fact that each side would secure its wish in certain points, making concessions on others. The Entente would win :

1. continuance of the war,
2. unity of action,
3. elimination of negotiation ;

The Central Powers would win :

4. immediate mutual exchange of precise terms.

To my mind "Via Pacis" ought to be at least as acceptable to the Entente as to the Central Powers.

"Via Pacis" contains two advantages not found in the propositions thus far put forward by the governments, but profitable to both sides :

1. Possibility to *amend* (if desired) terms submitted, keeping them valid up to date.
2. Possibility of demanding further *elucidation* of terms submitted, thus attaining precision and parity.

These features tend to throw automatically into the background and eliminate points of agreement and to correspondingly concentrate all attention upon the points in conflict. Thus a process of adjustment would ensue, tending to approximate more and more the respective terms and to reduce the disputed elements to the fewest number. The flexibility of the system is thus complete.

It may be said that the replies of the belligerents to President Wilson constitute the recognition of the adversary in his claim for enlightenment as well as of the neutral in his rôle as custodian of peace terms, as proposed in "Via Pacis", but fall short by implying that the statements were destined for the information of the neutral, rather than for transmission to the opponent.

"Via Pacis" suggests a technique as to "ways and means", to which President Wilson referred as being immaterial to him. It has the same aim in view (enunciation of terms) that formed the basis of Mr. Lansing's note of Dec. 18th, 1916. The broad principles proclaimed by the President would find expression in the successive amendments of the deposited peace terms and, so far as they found acceptance by both sides, would appear in the prevalence of greater harmony in the respective statements. For the time being, mediation seems to find no favor. In "Via Pacis", the belligerents begin to deal directly with each other and the heated discussions concerning the settlement would be effectively disposed of.

Let us now consider in the light of recent events from which side the suggestion that the method of "Via Pacis" be introduced might fitly come. The Entente Powers having stated their "aims" in cooperative response to President Wilson's invitation, certainly have ground to feel that no such overture should come from them. The unrestrained submarine policy leading to rupture with America was proclaimed shortly after President Wilson's invitation and since then the war has continued even more vigorously

than before, with a corresponding cessation of the exchange of notes concerning peace, at least until the recent utterances of the Pope. The Entente thus stands on record before the world as having formulated, at least in general terms, its aims, with the moral advantage thereby attained. Germany made the first public overture, but she did not follow her step to its logical conclusion. She stated she had her terms prepared, but did not make them known, nor has she met the announcement of the aims of the Entente by any equivalent declaration.

Whilst thus it is clearly fitting in the chronology of the situation, that the Central Powers should make the first move, we should not forget that they would scarcely feel inclined to desire "Via Pacis" so long as they hoped for a crushing military victory, for a separate peace with Russia or for an acceptance of a conference with peace negotiations. Also any internal want of unanimity or any disagreement between the Central Powers as to peace terms must offer a hindrance to the adoption of "Via Pacis".

Should these obstacles be cleared away, it might be a most opportune and effective act for the Central Powers to propose some such plan as "Via Pacis" for adoption by mutual assent. In accepting, the Entente would be favoring a belligerent, not a pacifist idea and would give no impression of weakness. It would merely establish, for both sides, what is now missing, a line of contact in the matter of mutual understanding of peace terms, while the war goes on. We know that the proposal follows the spirit of President Wilson's note. His note was, it is true,

written before America declared war; but we may certainly assume that his ideals have undergone no essential change and that such a proposal might to-day find favor in his eyes.

SUGGESTED SKETCH OF STEPPING STONES FOR PUTTING "VIA PACIS" INTO OPERATION

1. Consideration and decision by the allies whether "Via Pacis" would be a practical proposition.
2. Consideration and decision as to how it would be put into operation.

(My view respectfully submitted is that the proposal should come from the Central Powers.)

1. With a tacit understanding in advance as to its acceptance or
2. Without such understanding.
3. Acceptance by both sides.
4. Decision as to whether public announcement *of the decision to adopt* "Via Pacis" be made and as to whether public announcement *of terms* should later be made.
5. Neutral countries to be selected as custodians.
6. Acceptance by these neutral countries of their part.
7. Date set for first deposit of terms (decision as to intervals between and dates for any succeeding set of terms optionally put out by either side).

8. Conferences by affiliated nations of each side to formulate respective sets of terms.
9. Deposit of original documents of terms with neutral nations — they to forward copies to respective belligerents. (First sets of terms would naturally comprise only “demands”.)
10. “Via Pacis” then in operation — changes in terms if any subject to future desire. (Concessions made as desired, after review by each side of “demands” by other side, taken into consideration with his own situation.)

REFUTATION OF CRITICISMS OF “VIA PACIS”

1. “It is too practical, too commercial”.

To my mind, almost everything in this war has for purposes of efficiency been reduced to a business basis: men, money, supplies, manouvers, care of the wounded, etc. There is no reason why terms involving, not commercial, but high humanitarian considerations could not before hand find voice in the peace terms provided for by “Via Pacis”, just as readily as they could later be embodied in the final Peace Protocol. At some time the formulation would have to be made. The statement of terms, as I conceive it, might include matters of the highest ethical plane, where no taint of „commercialism” could possibly prevail.

2. "It is too ideal, too naive".

"Via Pacis" is only a method, a tool. In the hand of the statesman, it can be made to respond to his calm foresight and to the results of his cold calculations. Once in operation it has all the security of a world-wide pledge, with all neutral countries as witnesses (so far as the feature of publicity is adopted). The terms may be maintained high or reduced, just as practical policies may counsel, with no time limit.

3. "It is a peace plan".

Every war measure has as its object the attainment of peace. In this sense, Haig and Hindenburg are each working on a "peace plan", as truly as would "Via Pacis". For all that, "Via Pacis" is no pacifist scheme. The pamphlet might perhaps have fitly borne the title: — "Via Pacis or *Effective Warfare*". In truth, it is the attempt to secure early recognition for military ascendancy in war. Through its emphasis on *potential* strength, it may be said that not merely the armies now in the field, but also the reservoirs of untrained men and greater battles than any yet fought are thrown into the scale-pan of war. The only thing sought by "Via Pacis" is to secure at the earliest possible moment that outcome of the struggle which the relative forces available make inevitable. It endeavors to accomplish this by straight forward means, casting off the trammels of traditional diplomacy.

4. "Concessions made would show weakness".

The strength of one side need not be weakened by "concessions" made, any more than would be inevitably revealed by the war and economic status. On the other hand, the barometer of *strength* would be officially and formally presented and shown by the *demands* appearing alongside the concessions, and the positive story told by the former would offset any negative impression left by the latter. Indeed the concessions would be made merely to eliminate the elements upon which agreement was possible and so to lay especial emphasis upon the demands maintained. Even according to the alternative plan of peace negotiations, each side would come to the conference table prepared to make some concessions, as surely as if they were made in due course under the working of "Via Pacis". In effect, the past period has reduced and absorbed demands previously put forth. This revision has been a consequence of the war itself. "Via Pacis" only systemizes this process and renders it efficient. Concessions under "Via Pacis" involve nothing more, but are more advantageous to the granter than later concessions, in that a saving may be secured by the shortening of the war. So the "net" result would be a gain.

ZURICH, September 15th, 1917.

Harold F. McComick

November 23-1917

APPENDIX

VARIOUS PUBLIC UTTERANCES

Mr. BALFOUR:—"How can anyone go into the details and know in advance the work to be done by the peace conference, which will bring about the finish of this war? Every declaration made by a responsible Minister is looked at as the precise and detailed plan, on which the Government will act, when the moment for the final settlement has come. This is a very dangerous way to treat such kind of declaration. One cannot treat such problems with the same spirit of precision, as one can treat historical problems of the past. Nobody can foresee the condition in which the world will be at the moment, when these problems are to be decided upon. Dare you ask me now to take the risks which may be caused by giving details on these questions of utmost importance? He, who would try to do this now, would render a very bad service to his country".

(Upon the *present basis* Mr. Balfour is logical. Upon the basis of "Via Pacis", this objection would not exist. The purpose of everybody would then be to do this very thing.)

Premier RIBOT:—"What does the Chancellor want? He is endeavoring to dissimulate the difficulty he experiences in defining the war objects of Germany and the conditions on which she will make peace".

Mr. BONAR LAW:—"We have already declared our objects of war, but Germany has never done anything of the kind. Why not? Because the moment her conditions of peace should be formulated in writing, she would be unmasked".

LE MATIN:—"The crisis continues because the Kaiser, the Crown Prince and the government are more than ever determined not to state clearly the war aims of the Central Powers".

DAS FREMDENBLATT (Vienna):—"The time is past when the aims of war of the Central Powers, inspired as they are by a spirit of conciliation, can be distorted and obscured".

Father VAUGHAN:—"The Papal note will in fact induce the belligerent nations to proclaim with greater charness and precision the conditions of peace of each side".

Mrs. Fannie Fern ANDREWS, Member of the Executive Committee of the Central Organisation for a durable peace, Boston, U. S. A. :—"The [German] Government may be forced to state definite peace terms. The opinion is pretty general here that the next step in this direction should be taken by Germany".

President WILSON:—"We must await some new evidence of the purposes of the great peoples of the Central Empires. God grant it may be given soon, and in a way to restore the confidence of all peoples everywhere in the faith of the nations and the possibility of a covenanted peace".

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